

May 16, 2007

The Honorable Larry Gossett  
Chair, King County Council  
Room 1200  
C O U R T H O U S E

Dear Councilmember Gossett:

This transmittal provides a comprehensive analysis and recommendation that addresses ballot tracking and accountability, an essential element in King County's transition to all-mail voting in 2008. This information technology business case, which has been reviewed and approved by the Information Technology Project Review Board, is provided to council members in response to the supplemental appropriations proviso contained in Ordinance 15623, as adopted on October 16, 2006.

*Of the \$4,771,500 appropriated for OIRM Capital Projects (Project 377190), none of the \$2,700,000 for ballot tracking and processing and signature verification equipment and software shall be expended or encumbered until after the council reviews and approves by motion: (1) an Information Technology Business Case for the ballot tracking and processing and signature verification equipment and software that: (a) fully complies with the Guiding Principles and other applicable requirements set forth in the Strategic Technology Plan 2006-2008; and (b) has been reviewed and approved by the project review board*

When the Council passed Ordinance 15523 on June 19, 2006 making King County the largest jurisdiction in the nation to conduct all-mail elections, it provided the commitment and vision to transform the way we conduct elections. The council specified four conditions to be met prior to implementing all-mail voting. This business case outlines a recommended solution for one of those cases: *"an electronic tracking system established for tracking ballots so that voters can, through use of the Internet, follow the movement of their ballots as they move from King County to the voter and back to King County for counting and crediting the voter for voting"*. In addition, the report provides councilmembers with information necessary to make informed

policy decisions that will allow King County to meet the goal of conducting our first all mail election in April 2008.

This business case analyzes technologies from the four vendors who responded to our request for information that will allow voters to use the Internet to determine if:

1. Voter's ballot packet has been assembled and handed off to United States Postal Service (USPS).
2. King County confirms receipt of returned ballot packet (i.e. voted and USPS undeliverables).
3. Signature on ballot packet has been verified or challenged.
4. Ballot packet has been opened for ballot extraction.

Throughout Elections' effort in developing this business case, the issue of privacy of a voter's ballot has been constant. In focus groups on ballot tracking and accountability, in the courtroom, at legislative hearings, and in media articles/presentations much discussion has and is occurring about identifying ballots so they can be tracked by the voter. We believe that the part of the council's proviso stating ... "back to the County for counting and crediting the voter for voting" is satisfied by a process that identifies the ballot envelope and not the ballot itself. This is what we've heard voters say and, accordingly, the recommendation is not to code or bar code the ballot itself for tracking.

Information outlined in this business case will give our voters the highest level of ballot accountability while preserving every voter's right to a secret ballot. The hallmarks of this business case include redesigning our elections processes with technologies used in other business applications to provide more accurate, accountable, secure, transparent and efficient elections. The recommended technologies include mail processing equipment reengineered to track ballots, similar to how businesses track important mail.

The evaluation process began with analysis of four vendor solutions that met King County Elections' business objectives with one vendor solution that uniquely provides the software technology component for process management. Diebold Election Systems, Cowart Gagnon and Pitney Bowes submitted proposals for incoming ballot tracking solutions as well as VoteHere's proposed solution for process management. Proposals were evaluated on eight criteria including: security, accuracy, capacity, compatibility, reliability and maintenance, space and weight, and cost. The Pitney Bowes' Relia-Vote balloting system received the top score for ballot tracking and accountability equipment.

The Pitney Bowes' mail balloting system has been used in several similarly sized jurisdictions including Orange County, California with over 3 million ballots processed. The Relia-Vote mail balloting system uses mail technology that has been perfected over the past 85 years that will:

- ✓ provide high speed mail ballot packet sorting and data capture equipment,
- ✓ differentiate returned mail ballots through size, weight and data confirmation,
- ✓ expedite the signature verification process through digital image capture and automated signature verification; and
- ✓ provide a near-instant audit trail for all incoming ballot packet materials.
- ✓ A complete ballot accountability system cannot be achieved by equipment alone. VoteHere's MiBT (Mail-in Ballot Tracker) ballot tracking software offers the only true data integration and process management tool.

MiBT is specifically designed to take data captured at various points in the process and provide a nearly real-time look at ballot packet location throughout the mail ballot process and provide extensive opportunities for ballot packet accounting. Processes can be fully automated by scanning barcodes on mail envelope pieces at various points in the process. VoteHere's MiBT ballot tracking software has been used to track more than 1 million ballot envelopes in 20 Washington State counties.

After thoughtfully examining our current process and evaluating the County Council's requirement to provide voters with the ability to track their ballots, the following specific business objectives were established:

- ✓ **Perform ballot packet sorting, data capture and batching in-house.** Bringing this process in-house will increase ballot security and provide greater process transparency to the observing public. This will also allow for process efficiency by decreasing transport time between the U.S. Postal Service and the signature verification process thereby increasing security and reducing the numerous manual hand-offs.
- ✓ **Capture a digital image of each voter's signature from the return envelope.** Working with the image of the signature envelope will allow King County Elections (KCE) to place unopened ballot packets in secure storage while the signature verification process occurs. Additionally, efficiency will be gained from a side-by-side comparison of the signatures on a single computer monitor.
- ✓ **Implement automatic signature recognition (ASR).** The use of automatic signature recognition will provide greater efficiency to the signature verification process using trusted banking industry technology. ASR will provide greater consistency in evaluating signatures with statewide rules established by the Secretary of State. KCE staff will perform a second signature comparison check to confirm each signature rejected by the equipment.

- ✓ **Automate data capture for reconciliation of ballot duplication and challenged ballots.** Automating data captured for accountability and reconciliation will remove the variable of manual data entry, providing greater efficiency and accuracy. Greater accountability and transparency will be accomplished through improved reporting capabilities.
- ✓ **Capture voter data after a ballot packet has been opened.** The ability to capture data off the voter's opened return envelop to confirm the ballot was verified will increase process transparency and allow the voter to confirm that their signature was checked and that their ballot was sent forward for tabulation. Data captured will also provide greater accountability and efficiency for reconciliation purposes.

The following is a summary of the key issues considered in making a recommendation of the Pitney Bowes and VoteHere solutions:

	Pitney Bowes ReliaVote	VoteHere MiBT
Capture data of returned mail ballot packets.	✓	
Differentiate weight, size and data from returned mail ballot packets.	✓	
Digital capture of signature on envelope to enhance ballot security.	✓	
Automatic signature recognition.	✓	
Automated ballot envelope Reconciliation.		✓
Ability to capture voter data after a ballot packet is opened.		✓
Total data integration and process management tool.		✓

By combining the quality equipment and process management expertise from Pitney Bowes, the database and process management tools offered by VoteHere and the expertise of King County Elections' staff, the citizens of King County will be well served with a ballot envelope tracking and accountability system they can rely on.

In addition to meeting outlined criteria and the expectations of the public, Pitney Bowes has a worldwide reputation for service and quality in mail processing. The combination of Pitney Bowes and VoteHere with Diebold's higher speed tabulation solution, the tabulation vendor recommended in the March 30 report, will offer checks and balances for the overall tabulation system.

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To move forward with the procurement and transition to the Pitney Bowes and VoteHere solutions and countywide implementation of vote-by-mail, legislative action must be taken. I urge you to pass the motion approving the ballot tracking and accountability business case and keep the momentum of this historic transition to vote-by-mail moving forward. Your continued involvement and support are vital to the success of this effort.

Sincerely,

Ron Sims

King County Executive

Enclosures

cc: King County Councilmembers

ATTN: Ross Baker, Chief of Staff

Shelley Sutton, Policy Staff Director

William Nogle, Lead Staff, Operating Budget, Fiscal Management and  
Mental Health Committee

Anne Noris, Clerk of the Council

Bob Cowan, Director, Office of Management and Budget

Paul Tanaka, County Administrative Officer, Department of Executive Services (DES)

Sherril Huff, Director Designee, Records, Elections and Licensing Services Division, DES